

At-Home Care

What is “at home care”?

In the event of a large scale disease outbreak, bioterrorist attack, influenza pandemic or other public health emergency, your health care provider may request that you care for yourself or ill family members at home, rather than visiting a physician’s office or hospital emergency room.

What should I do if I am ill and my health care provider recommends at home care?

If you must care for yourself at home when you are ill, monitor your symptoms, including any fever. Keep your health care provider informed about your progress. Get plenty of rest. Eat small, healthy meals and drink plenty of water. Avoid alcohol and tobacco products. Check with your health care provider for a recommendation on taking comfort medications or antiviral medications.

Avoid spreading illness to other members of your household.

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Avoid sharing personal items like drinks, dishes, silverware and toothbrushes.
- Clean common surfaces such as telephones, door handles and faucets frequently.
- Use respiratory etiquette such as covering your cough and sneezing into a tissue.
- Discard used tissues and wash your hands with soap and water after coughing or sneezing.

What symptoms should I watch for?

Symptoms will vary, depending on the illness. If you are asked to care for yourself at home, consult your health care provider for a list of specific symptoms to monitor. Keep a list of your symptoms and the date and time they develop. Update your notes every four hours or when your symptoms change or disappear. Note your temperature and any medications you take, including the dosage.

If I have a fever, what should I do?

A fever may be uncomfortable, but it is not necessarily a bad thing. It is usually a sign that something is going on in your body. Fevers play an important role in helping your body fight off infections.

For adults a fever usually isn’t dangerous unless it measures 103°F or higher. For very young children and infants, though, even a slight temperature may be a warning sign of serious illness or infection. Newborns may even develop a subnormal temperature when ill. Contact your health care provider if a fever goes beyond—

- 102°F for adults
- 102°F for infants and children older than 3 months
- 100.4°F for infants up to 3 months old (rectal temperature)

If your fever remains below dangerous levels, and you aren’t sure why you have it, it may be best to not try to lower the fever. This can hide your symptoms and make it more difficult for health care providers to identify what is wrong. Also, some experts think that taking medication to relieve a fever may actually interfere with your body’s immune system. Some viruses live longer in cool temperatures, and by getting rid of your fever, you may be creating great living conditions for these viruses.

What should I do if things get worse?

Contact 9-1-1 immediately if—

- Coughing produces thick mucus
- Excessive thirst develops or the mouth or tongue become dry (dehydration)
- An existing medical condition worsens
- Irritability or confusion develop
- Skin turns blue or there is difficulty breathing
- A stiff neck develops
- Ability to move an arm or leg stops
- A first-time seizure strikes